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ABSTRACT

This presentation is a case study made up of student and faculty perspectives on bringing diversity and multicultural sensitivity to the education program at Otterbein College (Westerville, Ohio). An opening section describes Otterbein: its history; its characteristics as a small, predominantly white, coeducational, church-related liberal arts college; the work of its 1990 Commission on Diversity; and its efforts to increase campus diversity. A "faculty perspective" by Elizabeth Smith describes her efforts to design a course in multicultural education to move a homogeneous, white, Christian, largely Central Ohio undergraduate education population to a celebration of diversity and inclusiveness. One of this course's assignments requires each student to spend several hours in a setting where the student is in a distinct minority. Following this, a "student perspective" by Crystal Clark describes a student project to explore attitudes towards difference by interviewing individuals at a shopping mall about their reaction to interracial or homosexual couples. A second faculty perspective, by Michelina Smith, describes how the use of instructor as field supervisor for methods courses and the willingness of faculty to create a sense of "safe space" for students in the classroom help students in the development of multicultural education attitudes. Student and faculty comments on all these experiences are provided. The final section is a presentation by a recent graduate student on his development as a teacher of diverse students. (JB)

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Diversity Brings Noise to the "Quiet, Peaceful Village": Challenges and Small Victories

ED 394 908

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Diversity Brings Noise to the "Quiet, Peaceful Village": Challenges and Small Victories

In a quiet, peaceful village
there is one we love so true,
She ever gives a welcome
to her friends both old and new,
She stands serene
'mid tree tops green,
She's our dear Otterbein

Otterbein Love Song

words by Celia Ihrig Grabill, Class of 1900

Setting the Stage

This case study reflects efforts made by a professional education unit in a small liberal arts, church-related college located in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio to initiate a reform agenda focused on inclusiveness and multiculturalism. Certainly, this reform agenda is shared across teacher education institutions because of the changing demographics in the nation's schools combined with well-articulated arguments for increased attention to democratic principles of equity and access (see November-December, 1995, issue of the Journal of Teacher Education which focuses on the theme of "Preparing Teachers for Cultural Diversity"). Current research underscores the need for multicultural education by demonstrating the mismatch between the children we teach and teacher education candidates (Liston & Zeichner, 1990).

Otterbein College, founded in 1847, has a student body of approximately 2600 (largely undergraduate, traditional age and adult, with small graduate programs in Education and Nursing) and a full-time faculty of 131. Its mission statement is as follows:

> The mission of Otterbein College is to educate the whole person in a context that fosters the development of humane values. Otterbein College is a private, church-related, four-year co-educational college that sponsors traditional and continuing education programs of liberal arts and professional education at Baccalaureate and Master's levels. Our commitment is to the liberal arts as the broad base of all learning. (revised June 12, 1993)

The Education Department serves as the professional education unit for the College; with approximately 450 students pursing certification at the undergraduate, post-baccalaureate and MAT levels and 25-50 teachers working towards a graduate degree, the unit's population represents a sizable percentage of the total student population. Teacher education programs at Otterbein are designed to provide a coherent course of study which "fosters critical reflection within the context of collaborative learning."

> Building on a liberal arts foundation that emphasizes multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary ways of knowing, professional education requires students to examine their values and actions. Our mission is to build a community of life-long learners who can respect diverse perspectives, make sound decisions based on complex data, and be responsive to the changing needs of children in our society. (from "Model for Teacher Education at Otterbein College")

In November, 1990, the president of the College appointed a Commission on Diversity to review all areas and make recommendations for the development of programs and policies that would enhance the College's commitment to diversity. The Commission, in its 1991 report, recommended that all students " . . . be taught different cultural perspectives, develop understandings of different ethnic groups and make positive intergroup interactions a part of their personal development in college." During the same period, the Education Department was grappling with NCATE Standard I.A. (Design of Curriculum) as it prepared itself for an on-site review under revised NCATE standards.

A variety of faculty development activities helped to inform efforts to bring inclusiveness and multiculturalism to the "front burner." Full day, all-college fall faculty conferences focused the

campus on issues of diversity two years in a row (1990, 1991). Dr. Trudier Harris, Otterbein's first Visiting Humanities Scholar, conducted a faculty seminar on classroom applications of African-American Literature (1992). Josephine Scott, a multicultural specialist from Columbus City Schools, conducted a series of seminars for all College faculty and a special half-day in-service for the Education faculty (1993).

The seeds of change were beginning to "yield fruit" by 1993: Black Studies and Women's Studies minors had been created, new courses with an African-American emphasis had been approved in History and Sociology, outreach efforts to increase diversity in Education and Nursing had been funded. A new position entitled Director of Ethnic Diversity was developed and filled. Campus programming reflected a new interest in multiculturalism (Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation, Black History Month, Women's History Month, choice of commencement and special events speakers, etc.).

Despite increased awareness and structural shifts, the campus and the teacher education program today still look fairly homogeneous. In 1990, there were 95 minority students on campus (4% of the student population, up from 2% in 1985); by 1995 there were 180 (6.9% of the population). In 1990, there were 6 minority professors; by 1995 there were 12 (constituting 9.1% of the faculty). The professional education unit struggled with recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations and managed to increase minority student statistics from 9 in 1989 to 28 in 1995; one of the twelve full-time faculty in Education is African-American. Thus, progress has been made; however, Otterbein is still a largely white, overwhelmingly Christian, and Central Ohio-based campus.

How does a well-intentioned faculty provide students with courses and experiences which prepare them to embrace difference in an atmosphere of sameness? This session focuses on two initiatives which attempt to increase sensitivity and to promote attitude shifts.

Initiative #1: EDUC 360—Multicultural Education

FACULTY PERSPECTIVE: Elizabeth Smith

Upon making the decision to enroll in the teacher education program at Otterbein College undergraduates, both elementary and secondary, are faced with the requirement of taking a course entitled Multicultural Education. The course description listed in the college catalog is:

> Curriculum planning and teaching strategies for culturally diverse student needs. Racism, sexism, diverse learning styles and linguistic variation will be examined. A five hour clinical experience is a part of this course.

Inherent in this description are six objectives for student learning and growth. First, by quarter's end students are expected to come to an understanding of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values relative to topics and concepts associated with multicultural education. Second they should be able to identify the nature of the socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, language, gender and sexual orientation differences in individuals, especially in various school populations. Third they are to know and be able to implement curricular and instructional strategies to accommodate those differences in positive ways. Fourth students should recognize and be willing to state the contributions of the various macro-cultures which constitute American society. Fifth, they should be able to demonstrate a willingness to evaluate deficits relative to cultural pluralism. And finally as a result of this course, students are expected to value the need to provide an educational environment which advances the development of equal access and opportunity in America.

Faced with this description and a daunting set of objectives, how can a course be designed for the predominantly white, overwhelmingly Christian, largely Central Ohio undergraduate education population? What assignments and experiences should be required to help move this homogeneous population to a celebration of diversity and inclusiveness? How can a simple course provide the practical and theoretical foundation for students to incorporate multiculturalism into their own teaching philosophies and practice? How can I as an instructor impact these students so

that they leave this course with a new or strengthened commitment to diversity education and inclusiveness?

I strongly believe that attitudes, beliefs and values are at the core of multicultural education. Sonia Nieto (1996) in her definition of multicultural education states that it ". . . permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interaction among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning [emphasis added]" (p. 307). It is the personal values and beliefs which enable students to make that broader conceptualization of which Nieto speaks. It becomes my task to tap into those feelings during this 10 week course.

Early in the quarter students must complete one assignment which I call a "cultural event" which often gets at the heart of their philosophies and beliefs. It does so by requiring them to assume the position of "the other," to take on minority status and examine their responses. The syllabus reads:

> To meet the five clinical hours required for this course, each student must put themselves in a situation, attend an event, participate in an activity in which they are a noticeable minority. Some suggestions:
>
> -attend an African American church service
>
> -attend the Vietnamese church service at First Presbyterian
>
> -go to a gay bar
>
> -attend a function designed for hearing impaired persons
>
> You may find additional places to attend by reading alternative papers such as The Call and Post, The Other, The Gay People's Chronicle, or Alive. Once you have done this task take the time to write up the experience in a 5-6 page reflection paper. Be honest about your feelings, your fears and your new knowledge. How did it feel to be the minority in that situation? What learning occurred that impacted your own personal growth? What learning occurred that will impact you as an educator? Did you gain any new insights into that

particular cultural group? Were any preconceived ideas or stereotypes resolved or reinforced?

Quarter after quarter this assignment has a profound effect on many of the students. It impacts them on both a professional and personal level, with the latter being the most significant. Because that personal response can feed, as stated earlier, their conceptualization of diversity issues and education, this assignment continues to be a regular requirement. Their comments reflect the effect of the experience.

Responses taken from their papers and class discussions that show an impact on them as future educators:

> I can't help but feel guilty about some of the misconceptions I had before I went to New Salem [African American church], but I prayed last night God would forgive me for being a little closed minded [sic] at times. I have faith (a new faith) that I will be able to face any culture with confidence as a future educator. (K.V.; sp.95)
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>
> It was strange to be a minority. I had experienced it before, but being in the majority, it is easy to forget. You notice when you are different and feel threatened. (M.C.; sp.95)
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>
> As painful as it was to go to Summit Station [a gay bar] . . . I'm glad for this experience. I will be a more sensitive, fairer teacher because of how I felt to be treated as the minority. (J.S.; sp.95)
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> This incident . . . made me analyze how I look at people. I usually naturally, and sometimes consciously, look at people for who [sic] they are individually. I look at what they can offer me and what I can offer them. The experience with the Jewish service reinforced this for me. I feel as if this is the way that I need to look at the kids in the classrooms that I am going to teach. (A.C.; sp.95)
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The personal responses and reactions of these students to this assignment is striking. They speak to the issues of the pervasive nature of multicultural education. It impacts their interpersonal relationships, first by changing how they feel about and recognize themselves and second by encouraging them to look at how they have in the past and will in the future react to those persons who are culturally different than they.

Some of the student's comments and personal reactions include:

Not only have I learned about cultural differences of the African Americans, but I saw many different ways in which they view life, religion, their experiences, and that they seemed to have no problem with me entering into their world. I think that I will be able to be more open minded to new cultures. (K.V.; sp.95)

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Attending New Salem Baptist Church was a very positive and rewarding experience. I got a first hand idea of how frightening it can be to be a minority. Although I was treated very well, I still have an idea of what different ethnic groups might experience on a day to day basis. I remember how I felt when I thought that the man with the child did not sit next to me because I was white. I have never experienced that feeling before, and it is not one I would like to experience again soon. It is a feeling that no one should have to experience. (M.R.; wi.95)

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I had no idea when I read this assignment that doing it was going to change my life. I really believe it changed me forever. (R.J.; wi.96)

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I am glad my feeling of being discriminated against were just in my mind, but too often in this world for too many people feelings like I had are not imagined, they are real. (M.R.; sp.95)

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This assignment truly leads students to an understanding of the persuasiveness of multicultural education. They begin to see that it is far more than curricular inclusion. In other words, it is not just what happens in the educational setting, it is how things happen. Those interpersonal relationships, students involvement in and reactions to them, are a critical component of diversity education.

One group of students took this assignment a step further. Wanting to explore the notion of "the other," as well as people's reactions to marginalized individuals, they designed an experiment to be carried out in a shopping mall. What follows is their personal responses to that experiment as recorded by one member of the group.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: Crystal Clark

Hypothesis. When embarking upon this assignment, we hypothesized that both inter-racial couples and homosexual couples would illicit double-glances and perhaps looks of disapproval from the general population. Based upon prior interviews we felt that black women would respond with disapproving looks and comments to the white female and black male relationship.

Reaction interviews. Before conducting our experiment we asked Otterbein students and others from the general community how they felt they would react to seeing an inter-racial couple and a homosexual couple. Most of the responses were of the "politically correct" nature. Most people said that they had absolutely no problem with inter-racial couples, many of them knowing people who were involved in such relationships. The only variation to this answer came from black women, who claimed that they did not approve of black men dating white women. One woman said that black men only dated white women so "they could fit into society better." Based upon such statements we felt that the black male/white female relationship would get slightly stronger reactions than the black female/white male relationship.

Responses to seeing a gay or lesbian couple were much the same. Most of the men explained that "they were not gay, but they would not have a reaction to seeing a gay couple or lesbian couple in the mall." They did often stipulate that if the couples were outrageously

homosexual, kissing or fondling, they might say something to their friends or stare a little longer. Although these individuals felt they were saying it did not bother them, slight subconscious stereotypes were coming from their mouths:

"I don't have any problems with inter-racial couples, but at one time I didn't even want a white person to touch my food, 'cause they're dirty.'" (middle-aged black female at a mall)

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"Inter-racial couples? . . . I think its becoming very popular." (older white female at a mall)

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"Well I don't have a problem with biracial couples, in fact, I think its a great way to learn about other peoples' cultures." (20 year old white female at a mall)

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"How would I react to a homosexual couple? I guess it would just depend on if I thought they were a cute couple." (male Otterbein student)

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"I don't have a problem with homosexuals personally, because I'm a theatre major and I see it all the time." (female Otterbein student)

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"I used to look askance at that type of thing, but now it's like whatever makes you happy. . . . I could be in love with this tree if I wanted to." (older white male at Otterbein)

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The reactions above sound very harmless, but we felt that they contained subtle biases. One person acts as if homosexuality is a fad. Inter-racial couples are seen as a positive thing not because the individuals involved are in love with one another but because they are learning about the other's culture. With these reactions and comments in mind we headed to a local downtown mall to see if the reactions of the shoppers were reflections of the statements we heard.

Experiment. The group met at the mall on Sunday, February 12 and went back on Saturday, February 18, 1995. The mall was especially crowded and there were a diverse mixture

of people walking around. We used a videotape and two observers to make note of reactions and comments. The combinations included a black female, white male and black baby boy (Crystal, Lance and Jordan); two white males (Lance and Jimmy); a white female and black female (Mindy and Crystal); and a black male, white female (Simeon and Mindy).

Crystal and Lance were the first to walk together. The strongest reaction we got to the couple was a woman in an eyeglass store who turned around in her seat a total of three times to stare and watch them. Crystal noted that while we all walked into a major store together, Julie and Mindy were given coupons, while she was not. People did take the time to look at the couple. One teenage girl commented to her friend, ". . . but there ain't nothing wrong with inter-racial relationships." As far as we could see the reactions were mainly mild and internal, with a few external comments and bodily reactions.

The next inter-racial couple included Simeon and Mindy. We were surprised that they rarely got a second glance. However, Simeon felt that he was getting "crucified" by the white males because of the looks of disapproval. The strongest reaction Mindy observed was that of Simeon's. They ran into two people that he knew while they were walking together and both times he dropped his hand and walked as fast as he could toward that person pretending he didn't know her. When she came and stood next to him, he quickly explained that he was helping out with a class project and the he had to hold hands. Even if other people watching weren't uncomfortable, Simeon certainly was.

The next couple that walked together were Jimmy and Lance. We were all unprepared for the reactions that we saw from people. Everyone stared, some people laughed and others made verbal comments. One man drop-kicked the air and said "This is what those faggots need." Another man put the Bible in front of the camera saying "The good word, that's what those boys need." Other comments ranged from "I could have gone my whole life without seeing that" to "Damn that one guy is cute; too bad he's a faggot." The actions that we saw and the comments that were made were much more obvious and outrageous than what we had hypothesized.

Crystal and Mindy were the last couple to walk. Almost everyone who passed took a second glance and some even called out to their friends across the mall to take a look. We all agreed that even though Crystal and Mindy went beyond just lesbianism to inter-racial lesbianism, two women walking together did not get the strong reaction that the men had.

Overall, we felt that our hypotheses were not supported. While the reactions to the inter-racial relationships were mild, they were actually milder for the black male and white female than for the white male and black female. The homosexual couples illicited responses that we would have never dreamed of. After all, almost everyone we interviewed said that they would have no reaction to a homosexual couple holding hands and walking in the mall. What this proved for us was that we all seem to want to accept everyone and if we're asked how we would react we give the answer that we think is the right one, the "politically correct" one. Yet when we tested the waters we found that the age old adage is true: actions do speak louder than words.

Personal reactions. We thought we might end by giving some of our own informal feelings about the experiment and the parts we played during this project.

Julie: I really wasn't involved in the actual experiments themselves so I got to really observe the way people responded. I felt that there were a lot more reactions given than were recorded on the videotape. I saw a lot of laughing and pointing along with looks of disgust. I was most surprised by the reactions to the homosexual couples. While Jimmy and Lance received the most vocal reaction, Crystal and Mindy received more reactions of disbelief and comments like "Oh, my God." I think that they had to look twice just to make sure if they were seeing what they thought they were.

Crystal: I wasn't uncomfortable holding hands with Lance, but I noticed that when Mindy and I were holding hands, we did not interlock fingers and we walked as far away from each other as we could; it was an awkward experience. Mindy made me feel even more uncomfortable because of how fast she was walking down the mall; the camera people could barely get us on tape. I was somewhat offended by the lady in

the store who was nosy enough to ask Lance if this was his baby and if I was the mother. I didn't really notice the reactions that Mindy and I were getting. Overall, I realized that neither inter-racial couples or lesbian couples were really free to shop without receiving some sort of unwanted attention.

Lance: I had no problems holding hands with Crystal and I noticed many of the same things that she did. Holding hands and walking with Jimmy was a completely different story. My knees were shaking and I felt sick to my stomach. I put on a hat and glasses so that I wouldn't be as recognizable and I just kept walking until I got to the other side of the mall. It was such an awkward experience that when we went back to the mall the next weekend, I could hardly stand to be there. The reactions we got the first time were so strong that I was actually fearful that someone might physically attack us.

Mindy: The thing that I kept thinking while Crystal and I were walking was that for the first time in my life I felt like a minority, like I did not belong in this particular place. Before we even walked I had to gear myself for the experience. In all honesty, I looked at Crystal and said, "You know that I'm not gay and that we're both okay with our sexualities. . . ." It was a sad comment to make, but it was a tough thing to do. I suppose I realize now how difficult it is to try and be something you're not. For a brief 10 minutes I experienced what a closet homosexual must experience. I knew that I was heterosexual but no one on the third floor did. I can't help but wonder if that is how helpless homosexuals feel when they grow up and try to fit into the norm of society. I wonder if when they do come out and they're walking down the mall with their partners if they want to scream, "Don't look at me, I am not evil or disgusting, I am just like you and like you I find your sexual preference unusual but I refrain from laughing and pointing because I know what it feels like to be hated and humiliated based upon nothing more than who I go home with at night."

Initiative #2: Instructional Methods Applied in Multicultural Settings

FACULTY PERSPECTIVE: Michelina Smith

The overall setting and population with which we, as teacher educators at Otterbein College, work has been described. The question of dealing with the attitudes and values which are brought to our program and the purposeful means by which we attempt to present questions of diversity have been initiated through the multicultural education course. Some of the initial effects of our work in this area become visible in the instructional methods courses.

Secondary Methods students at Otterbein College are placed in a Columbus (Ohio) public secondary or middle school classroom. All of these placements are considered urban; many are inner-city; all include a diverse student population. Pre-experience perceptions of these placements by our students is often one of fright, apprehension and sometimes, rejection. At various points in the quarter, a change begins to be noted and by the end of their 100 hour field experience a large number of our students share positive attitudes toward and are supportive of their students. A sense of "I didn't want to do this, but . . ." becomes visible. The change can be documented. The questions become: What forces are at work within our students that allow this process to become activated, and to what extent does our teacher education program drive those forces?

Two strategies utilized in our program become very important in our ability to document evidence of student development in the implementation of multicultural education concepts. These are the use of instructor as field supervisor for the methods courses and the willingness of our faculty to create a sense of "safe space" for students within the college classroom. The manner by which these two strategies influence our students' development in multicultural education attitudes, values and skills is the focus of this portion of our presentation.

The utilization of instructor as field supervisor provides a "theory in practice" opportunity. Not only do the instructor and student interact within the college classroom as concepts and experiences are shared, but they also actively participate in such behaviors within a school setting.

Opportunity for immediate feedback and "on-the-spot" discussion become critical to the developmental process.

The use of journal entries extends the opportunity for field-related discussion between student and instructor. Such entries become a source of documentation for the development of multicultural education attitudes, values and skills. By purposefully including practices in our courses that encourage students to change attitudes and develop a sense of valuing diversity, we can plan strategies that allow them to put that value into action within their teaching practices.

The role of environmental issues in the process of change has been noted (Levy & Merry, 1986). Change, as a developmental process, suggests that the transition from one stage to another is preceded by crisis, chaos, and "muddling through" (Levy & Merry, 1986). A critical environmental characteristic for change to occur is the presence of "safe space." Such a presence provides that sense of security for our students as they travel through that chaotic, muddling time. Methods faculty recognize change as a developmental process and allow students the time and quality of understanding that help bring about the change in attitude and values required for a genuine and sincere respect for diversity.

Three questions are addressed in our methods courses:

1. What is the specific standard to which we are striving?
2. What specific behaviors do we want our students to demonstrate?
3. What specific means will we use to assess achievement by our students?

The answers to each of the questions are, in general terms, found within the NCATE standards to which Otterbein College is bound. The specific manner by which we address them becomes our particular challenge.

The first purposeful action taken to address these questions on issues of diversity is the field placement itself. All Otterbein methods students participate in urban, rural and suburban settings. Early Field Experience course students begin their formal exposure to public school classrooms in a suburban school setting. Methods course students are placed in an urban school setting. For many of our students this is their first exposure to a school setting which holds a

diverse population. Initial personal reactions to this type of setting can be found in several students' journals:

> . . . there was no denying that city schools are totally different from anything I had ever experienced before. I was truly shocked by some of the stats the cooperating teacher shared with me. I'm cautiously looking forward to tomorrow. . . . (M.B.; sp.95)

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> . . . for a second I felt sorry for myself being in an inner-city classroom for my first teaching experience. . . . (T.G.; sp.95)

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> I always tried to allow color not to be an issue in the experiences I have with my life, but I know that it is. . . . (A.McL.; au.95)

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> I think part of my nervousness at the start was due to the school system (Columbus Public) I was placed in for methods. I had a negative attitude toward Columbus public schools and the students that attended them. . . . (J.S.; sp.95)

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By asking our students to become reflective learners through the journal-writing process, they (and we) became aware of where they were at the start of the experience. By the end of the experience most of our students become sensitive to issues important to their students.

Entries included reports of their students being actively involved in social roles that they themselves never experienced even as college students.

> I realized many had more advanced and adult problems they had to deal with at home than I had at 16 years old. . . . (T.K.; sp.95)

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They learned how such out-of-school problems impacted their students' in-school behavior. Our students learned to recognize how they were influenced by media and past perceptions.

> What I have discovered over these 9 weeks is that kids are kids. My high school attitude was wrong. Many of the students that I had this quarter were very intelligent. There were problems at the school with kids skipping school and other behavior problems, but that is normal, kids will be kids. . . . (J.S.; sp.95)
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> - - - - - - - - - -
>
> I'm starting to believe most of these kids have better critical thinking skills than I first expected . . . when asked to give their opinion they offer it. . . . (M.B.; sp.95)
>
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>
> Then I saw that the students, tired, sometimes scared, kept showing up day after day. They, like me, had a desire to be there, just had trouble admitting it. I wish I were back seeing those same faces everyday. (T.B.; sp.95)
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Thus, journal entries help us document a sense of growth in positive attitude and value regarding diverse learners. An ability to translate this new respect and value for diversity into actual instruction is the skill toward which we strive.

A second purposeful action is the use of a cultural difference theory in our methods instruction. We endeavor to help our pre-service teachers see that different cultural groups may have different ways of learning. This issue is addressed through a variety of strategies. One is to focus attention on the means by which students communicate. This was beautifully identified by English Education students. One such student was working with 10th graders, developing a poetry unit. The instruction of meter was brought to life within her classroom of resistant adolescents when she decided to address the topic through the use of rap rhythm. She was very excited over the work her class produced. Other students also learned to appreciate the uniqueness of their students' language and the value of adjusting assignments to reflect that uniqueness.

I am convinced that these students can learn and gain an appreciation for the English language if I am a good enough teacher to present it in a medium they can easily manage. (T.G.; au.94)

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The development and implementation of a two week unit of study is a significant assignment for the methods class students. This assignment calls for our students to demonstrate an understanding of how different learning styles may be addressed within a unit. Students are expected to present goals, objectives, strategies and materials to be used. Small group, whole group and individual activities and a variety of assessment strategies are to be included. Thus, lesson development and implementation become major means of identifying achievement in the ability to apply a cultural-difference theory to real classroom lessons.

Use of a thematic approach as a valuable means for providing a number of experiences, techniques and materials to be interwoven into a unit, has been acknowledged (Gay, 1977). Practice in such an approach was presented to our methods students as a final project option. It was exciting to see pre-service secondary teachers weave art, music, and literature into a study of the Civil War!

If we acknowledge the existence of classroom culture, then successful teacher candidates will need to create a classroom culture in which their diverse body of students will all have a chance to succeed academically.

To attest to at least one of the "small victories" at Otterbein College we have brought a recent graduate to talk with you about his development as a teacher of diverse students.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE: Tom Fry

Multicultural education is something that most education majors know very little about. Just like with all things that we are unsure of or do not fully understand we come to fear this great unknown. And with the unknown comes myths. Where these myths start is hard to tell, but they impede the development of a teaching style that is not only useful but necessary in today's diverse

society. I felt afraid and believed many myths before taking Education 370 at Otterbein College and student teaching in New Mexico.

I came from a very small rural school in Central Ohio and knew next to nothing about multicultural education. I had never been introduced to different cultures. Even at Otterbein there was limited opportunity to interact with people different from myself. I dreaded going into an inner-city school. So many questions: Would they listen to me, accept me, respect me? Dr. Smith, our professor, told us not to worry and that by the end of the quarter we would not want to leave. She really knew what she was talking about; the myths of inner-city schools and doubts about my ability to cope in a multicultural setting soon fell by the wayside.

I was aware of social problems associated with urban schools: guns, drugs, teenage pregnancy, lack of parent involvement, etc. Although teachers told me that guns and drugs were present in the school on occasion, I never saw either or even heard talk. I think the reason you hear about these problems in inner-city schools more than in rural schools is obvious. It is not that the inner-city kids are more likely to be bad and do the wrong thing. It is simply that the inner-city schools are bigger and have more publicity than do the rural schools. When 10 girls in an inner-city school get pregnant it is a problem; when two girls get pregnant in a rural school, their situations are not discussed widely. At my high school a surprising 9% of the female population was pregnant in 1991. That percentage is close to or higher than that of the city schools, but it is overlooked in the news.

It is true that many of the city school kids did not have good home lives. My experience with inner-city kids through my Education 370 course showed me that many of my students worked harder to stay in school than did middle class, suburban kids. For these kids who have it extremely rough at home you need to be more than just a teacher: you need to be a person. For example, a young lady in my class was never absent but would go to sleep in class. At first I got upset with her and would be on her to stay awake. Then I found out that there were real problems at home and sometimes Mom and Dad would fight until 2:00 a.m. Sometimes as a teacher you need to understand there may be more important things going on in the students' lives than what

you are teaching at school. The young lady and I worked out a deal where during lunch she would make up work she missed in class. This was a real problem and it could affect any kid, but it was more likely to occur in city schools simply because there are more kids in these schools.

Now having more kids means you are going to have bigger classes with kids from different backgrounds; here was my next fear. How was I, a boy raised in a small rural school with little multicultural background, going to be able to teach these kids? That was easier than I thought. You just teach them; kids are kids are kids. It doesn't matter what color their skin is or how they look, it is truly what is on the inside that counts. It all comes down to respect. If you give respect you will get it back. Be strict but fair and above all admit that you do not know it all. This is how I succeeded in multicultural situations. The city schools are packed with kids and they are all different, but it is not as difficult as everyone thinks to be a multicultural teacher.

Does it take more work to teach multiculturally? Not really. When you are doing your lesson plans and researching your information it is right there in front of you. There is not only one culture that discovers new things or makes inventions. When you talk about the invention or person it gives you a perfect time to tie it in. And you can usually find some information on the specific culture very easily and then let the kids take over. They are living this culture and are the experts. Give them the chance to better explain what you do not know. They have grandparents or aunts, uncles, parents who can share with them so they can share with the class. Maybe it will take time that as a teacher you don't think you can spare, but I'm telling you that it is time well spent for all the opportunities it will offer you and your students.

My methods field experience "hooked" me on multicultural settings and encouraged me to student teach in a mission school in New Mexico. If you teach multiculturally, you will have better class involvement; you share information on all races instead of just one, and you give all kids a chance to be proud of their heritage. Once you get this instilled in the kids they will point out things pertaining to the lesson that you may not even have known. For example, in New Mexico we were talking about the harmful effects of rivers flooding because of melting mountain snow. One of my students who was Native American told us how her grandmother and her people had

tied this event to spring and life. She said that if it were not for the mountain allowing the snow to melt and flood the rivers, the river banks would be dry all spring and summer. Without the flooding there would be not spring flowers because the seeds would dry out, and the farmers would not be able to raise crops. The entire class listened as she talked, and it helped us all learn something very important. Because of her cultural background, she showed us that something potentially devastating was also positive. It was an extremely powerful episode, and I believe all of the students will remember that story. I know I will.

All teachers need to be taught to know their students so they can find out how they learn and what works for them. If you do not know your students you cannot help them to reach their potential. This fits into the framework of multicultural education. While teaching in New Mexico I made the grandest of cultural errors. There were about five students who were of the Sikh religion. Sikhism is a cross between the religions of Islam and Hinduism; it is a culture as well. Certain facts about the culture are important to know. Sikhs are no allowed to cut their hair. Girls wear their hair up, while boys wear theirs up in a turban. Sikhs take much pride in their names, and for English speakers, their names may be hard to pronounce. Last but not least, Sikhs have the same religious last name, Khalsa. Do not assume that they are all brothers and sisters or even cousins. My five Sikh students were: Sat Kriaya Khalsa, Dhurum Khalsa, Gurumandir Khalsa, Sat Amrit Khalsa, and Guruaftar Khalsa. My first mistake was in not asking them to pronounce their names. After a few minutes of butchering their names, I proceeded to try and ease my embarrassment by asking how they liked all being in the same class since they were relatives. It did not go well in that class for a few weeks, until they finally forgave me. A few minutes of forethought could have saved me weeks of regret.

I do not blame them for being upset with me. I violated their cultural norms by not understanding and not asking questions. All cultures are equally important and it is our job as teachers to show this by giving as much time to each culture wherever and whenever possible. It sounds like a huge task and one that is impossible to implement, but it isn't. After you dismiss the myths and any fears you may have, you will see that it is actually very beneficial. And even

though it does take some extra time to do some research, isn't it worth it to be an effective teacher? Is it not our job as teacher to know our students? The real world is full of many different cultures. If we only teach our students about one then are we really teaching our students (your children) how to succeed or are we just preparing them to fail?

Challenges and Small Victories

Part of the unit's conceptual framework is that students are expected to develop a sensitivity to the "social context of schooling" (Valli & Tom, 1988). Courses and field experiences are designed to help students deal with their own attitudes towards race, gender, ethnicity, exceptionality and sexual orientation. Questions arise throughout the program on how these variables impact on decisions about curriculum, instruction, and classroom organization. How can one generalize without stereotyping? What value judgments are implicit in labels? How do teachers contribute to the social inequality which exists within school and society? Assumptions which undergird action are made conscious. Expert teaching requires "the capacity for principled thought" (Barnes, 1989).

The students provide first-hand accounts of the impact of course assignments and field experiences on their thinking. In order to make our students think, we ask them, even force them, through the design of assignments to feel. However, feelings are insufficient; one must address these feelings by putting them into words. Journal entries, reflective papers, class discussions, and debriefing sessions with instructors/field supervisors require students to employ metacognitive (and meta-affective, to coin a new phrase) strategies.

Multicultural education is good education; as one of our students says, "kids are kids" and all kids need attention paid to their background, interests, and learning styles. Until pre-service teachers become convinced of differences and accept them without making value judgments, they are not truly free to look for commonalities. As a teacher education program, we have challenged ourselves and our students to make difference and sameness conscious. We challenge you to the same.

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